DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 477 879 EC 309 656

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| AUTHOR | Vaughn, Sharon; Bryant, Diane Pedrotty |
| TITLE | Reading Comprehension Interventions That Enhance Outcomes for English Language Learners with LD, 10/01/98-09/30/02. Final Report. |
| INSTITUTION | Texas Univ., Austin. |
| SPONS AGENCY | Special Education Programs (ED/OSERS), Washington, DC. |
| PUB DATE | 2002-09-30 |
| NOTE | 8p. |
| CONTRACT | H324D980020 |
| PUB TYPE | Reports - Research (143) |
| EDRS PRICE | EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | *Cooperative Learning; Elementary Education; *English (Second Language); Inclusive Schools; *Instructional Effectiveness; Language Minorities; *Learning Disabilities; Middle School Students; *Reading Comprehension; Reading Fluency; Reading Instruction; Reading Rate; *Reading Strategies |

ABSTRACT

This final report discusses the activities and outcomes of a project that explored the effectiveness of strategies for teaching reading comprehension to English language learners with learning disabilities who are failing to acquire the comprehension skills to learn from print. A series of studies was conducted over a 3-year period that investigated the effectiveness of: vocabulary (semantic mapping and fluency); repeated partner reading (PR); reading comprehension strategies (before, during, and after reading); and collaborative strategic reading (CSR). Students (n=171) in grades 3-6 and their teachers participated in the studies. Results indicated: (1) there were statistically significant effects for rate of reading and correct words read per minute, but not accuracy or comprehension, for both PR and CSR for both low-to-average achieving students and students with disabilities; (2) students with and without disabilities who were provided a multicomponent reading intervention including word identification, fluency (PR), and content area comprehension (CSR) instruction, improved in accuracy of oral reading and fluency; and (3) intensive reading instruction in word study, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension with English language learners (grades 4-5) who are struggling students did not produce statistically significant results between the experimental and comparison groups. (CR)

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# Reading Comprehension Interventions that Enhance Outcomes For English Language Learners with LD

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**H324D980020**

**Project Period 10/01/98-09/30/02**

**FINAL REPORT**

**Describe the project.**
The purpose of this research project was to conduct a series of studies that build and extend the knowledge base on the essential elements of comprehending text: vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension strategies. The intent was to determine the effectiveness of strategies for teaching the essential elements of reading comprehension to English language learners with learning disabilities in regular classrooms who spend most or all of their time there and who are failing to acquire the comprehension skills to learn from print.

**Describe the context.**
This project was implemented in two school districts that serve students who are English Language Learners and students with disabilities who received instruction primarily in general education classes. Third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students and their teachers participated in this series of studies across the multiple years of implementation. Instruction in the essential elements of reading were challenging for most of the teachers in terms of what constituted effective reading instruction for struggling students.

**Describe how the goals were accomplished.**
A series of studies were conducted over a three-year period that addressed questions about the effectiveness of reading comprehension interventions for English language learners with learning disabilities in regular classrooms. The three interventions studied were: vocabulary (semantic mapping and fluency); repeated partner reading (PR) and reading comprehension strategies (before, during, and after reading); and collaborative strategic reading (CSR). The studies were conducted in different grade levels and included student outcome and teacher change data. The studies for each year are summarized below.

In Year 1, eight third-grade teachers and their 111 students participated in a twelve-week study that was conducted within regular classroom settings. Sixteen of the students demonstrated significant reading problems and qualified for special education or were identified by the school district as dyslexic. This study addressed the differential effects of fluency and comprehension instruction on both fluency and comprehension outcomes in two groups of students: those with significant reading problems and low to average achieving students. To address this question, eight classrooms of third-graders and their

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teachers were assigned to one of two interventions: (a) partner reading, designed to enhance fluency, or (b) collaborative strategic reading, designed to enhance comprehension. Results indicated no statistically significant main effects or group-by-time interaction effects, however, over time (pre- to posttest), there were statistically significant effects for rate of reading and correct words read per minute but not accuracy or comprehension for both partner reading and collaborative strategic reading for both low-to-average achieving students and students with reading disabilities.

In Year 2 Part 1, 10 sixth-grade middle-school teachers and their 60 targeted students (14 students with reading disabilities, 17 low-achieving students, and 29 average-achieving students) participated in a four-month professional development and intervention program to enhance reading outcomes. The multicomponent reading intervention included three reading strategies: word identification, fluency (PR), and content area comprehension (CSR). All three groups improved in accuracy of oral reading and fluency. Although many students made significant gains in word identification, fluency and comprehension, a subgroup of very poor readers made little or no gains. Implications for enhancing outcomes for students with severe reading disabilities by providing intensive reading instruction (i.e., small group explicit instruction) are provided.

In Year 2 Part 2, ten sixth-grade middle school teachers, including general and special education teachers, participated in a four-month professional development and intervention program to enhance the reading outcomes of struggling students in inclusive content area classes. The professional development program consisted of an examination of teachers' personal knowledge of struggling readers and reading instruction and staff development and support to help teachers integrate three reading strategies, which focused on word identification, fluency, and comprehension skills, into their content area instruction. Implementation of the strategies was monitored and teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the reading strategies for their students were obtained.

In Year 3, casestudy methodology was employed to describe how reading comprehension instruction occurred in a resource setting given the reading levels of the students and how the students came to understand how to implement the strategies. One resource teacher and her students who had severe reading disabilities participated in this descriptive study. Multiple sources were used for data collection purposes. Results revealed the necessity of intensive instruction, the in-depth nature of vocabulary activities, and the perceptions of the teacher towards reading comprehension instruction.

In Years 2 – 3, a study was conducted that examined the effects of intensive reading instruction in word study, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension with fourth and fifth grade English language learners who were struggling students (Year 2) and a follow-up of five of these students who were most resistant to intensive intervention. Results from Year 2 indicated no statistically significant results between the experimental and comparison groups. Results from Year 3 are under review for further examination and analyses.

**Describe problems encountered and how they were solved. Identify and describe the lessons learned.**

Overall, two major issues were identified from this series of studies. The first issue focused on teacher change. Once again, we were reminded about the time and effort it takes to help teachers learn strategies and to use those strategies with a high degree of fidelity. Teachers need support and resources to assist them with implementing reading interventions that may not be familiar to them. This support must become a part of the campus-reading plan to promote implementation and sustainability. At the middle school level, we learned about the influence of the teaming model that supports teachers' implementation of strategies across content areas and provides a forum of collegiality. The second issue focused on the significant resistance to treatment demonstrated by a small group of upper elementary students. Despite an intensive intervention involving the essential reading elements, these students demonstrated minimal gain. The second part of this study is under analysis to determine the effects of year 2 intervention on reading outcomes for these students.

**Discuss the results of the research.**

In Year 1: Many of the students in this study were low readers (43% of the third-graders were at second-grade reading level or below on both pretest measures). This means that the teachers were providing fairly complex reading strategies (main idea, summarization) to many students whose reading performance was more like second-graders. This may in part explain the low impact on reading comprehension. We observed that the two interventions were significantly different in their level of complexity for teacher implementation. PR had very specific procedures for organizing students (mixed-ability pairs) and for teaching students to take turns reading and charting their progress. Teachers readily acquired the procedures for implementing this process with their students. On the other hand, CSR was a more complex intervention that required teachers to learn four strategies and to teach them to students in an integrated manner. While PR was in full-implementation by the second week, CSR took considerably longer for teachers to present to their students and to integrate into reading practice (most teachers were not into full implementation until after week 4). For this reason, we think that future research might benefit from the provision of time for teachers and students to learn the strategies.

In Year 2 Part 1: There is growing consensus that to the extent possible students with reading disabilities are best educated in the general education classroom. However, the issue of how to provide this education is paramount. Based on our research, we recommend a two-pronged approach. First, the overall quality and nature of instruction for students with disabilities within general education classrooms must be improved. Ideally, for this to be accomplished, school-wide practices that enhance outcomes for all students need to be identified and implemented. Second, the overall intensity of instruction for struggling readers and students with reading disabilities must be increased. Some evidence suggests that for the intensity to be sufficient, one-on-one instruction provided by well-trained professionals may be needed. However, one-on-one instruction is very expensive and may not be appropriate, particularly at the middle-school level. Thus, in this study, we attempted to provide the necessary intensity by offering the same

professional development strategies to an entire team of middle-school teachers. The rationale was that if all of the teachers who these students encountered utilized the same three strategic approaches for building reading and content area knowledge, students would both acquire and practice the skills with sufficient intensity. Nevertheless, there remains a group of students with reading disabilities who require intensive, individualized or small-group instruction in addition to the general education curriculum.

In Year 2 Part 2: Several lessons were learned regarding implementation of content area reading strategies in middle school classes. First, we had hoped for higher levels of fidelity and frequency of implementation as an indicator of the success of the project, but this was only a semester-long project where teachers were implementing three reading strategies almost simultaneously. Although teachers seemed to be interested in learning new reading strategies ("It was real encouraging to find out that there were strategies that we could implement on a daily basis"), the lower levels of fidelity for Word Identification and CSR suggest that reading strategy instruction for both teachers and students takes time. On the other hand, the "time" issue for Partner Reading, which had the highest levels of fidelity, related to giving up something so that PR could be integrated into the school day. Teachers found a way to integrate this strategy into the school day by giving up their advisory time so students could focus on the fluency building strategy. Also, teachers did not have to juggle focusing on teaching content material and integrating the strategies simultaneously as they did with Word Identification and CSR, which probably contributed to the higher IVC rating for PR. The challenge with Partner Reading was finding a time for focusing on skill building. This type of instruction does not occur in middle school content classes, so teachers have to give up something from their instructional day to make fluency-building instruction happen.

Second, teachers expressed a need for more materials that could better match their students' reading abilities. In this study, teachers used their textbooks and supplemental reading material for CSR; we provided the reading material for PR. Middle school teachers need access to a variety of reading material that matches their curriculum and the reading levels of their students. Without this support, teachers find strategy implementation time consuming and challenging.

Third, although the teachers questioned the utility of the strategies for their higher achieving students, they did not indicate significant problems with this group of students. This finding matches the results of other studies that have investigated the effects of strategy instruction on higher achieving students. If reading strategies are going to be used by teachers in content classes, teachers must be assured that this type of instruction will be helpful and not create problems for a group of students who may already possess effective strategies.

Fourth, teachers were beginning to see the effects of the strategies on students' learning through overt student behavior. Particularly, the special education teachers noticed students with special needs, including English language learners, using the reading strategies to break apart words (Word Id) and to figure out "clunks" (CSR). Progress monitoring is important to ensure that struggling readers are benefiting from strategy instruction and that they are receiving the level of instructional intensity they

need to learn. In this study, we attempted to provide this intensity by offering the same professional development strategies to an entire team of middle-school teachers.

Year 3: Case study results indicated that a resource teacher can implement reading comprehension strategies including vocabulary instruction successfully with her struggling readers but that ongoing support in a year-long study was necessary to ensure high fidelity of implementation. We learned that the teacher integrated both small and whole group instruction where whole group was used for modeling and checking for understanding. Small group instruction was used for strategy implementation and peer facilitation. This teacher was taught to use a combination of strategic and direct instruction before, during, and after the reading process. However, content enhancement, such as advance organizers, graphic organizers, and specialized materials, were necessary to help students interact with text more successfully. Explicit vocabulary instruction and multiple opportunities for students to use word meanings was critical for struggling readers because they typical lacked a rich vocabulary base due to a lack of exposure to wide reading that good readers possess.

**Discuss the implications for practice, policy and future research (including recommendations for OSEP).**

Several implications are notable from this series of studies. First, research is needed on identifying comprehension assessment practices that are sensitive to change demonstrated by students resulting from reading comprehension strategy instruction. Proximal measures of comprehension are needed to note more specifically the effect of strategy implementation. Second, continued research is needed with struggling students who are English language learners and who have reading disabilities to document and replicate the interventions that are necessary to promote access to and mastery of the general education curriculum. Third, continued research is needed on effective interventions for struggling readers at the middle school level and ways that these interventions can be implemented parsimoniously. The needs of students who are treatment resisters at the upper elementary and middle school level must be carefully studied to determine best practices for this group of struggling students.

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